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COMMUNICATIONS CONCERNING THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Non-confidential list of communications concerning the status of women

Note by the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 76 (V) of 5 August 1947, as amended by Council resolution 304 I (XI) of 14 and 17 July 1950, and Council resolution 1983/27 of 26 May 1983, the present report summarizes the communications received by the Division for the Advancement of Women during the period 1 December 1993 to 30 November 1994, as well as information received by other units of the United Nations Secretariat (including the regional commissions), other United Nations bodies and the specialized agencies, together with information on any appropriate action taken. The communications deal with principles relating to the promotion of women's rights in the political, economic, civil, social and educational fields.

SUMMARY OF NON-CONFIDENTIAL COMMUNICATIONS CONCERNING THE STATUS OF WOMEN

A. Communications concerning the status of women received by the Division for the Advancement of Women of the United Nations Secretariat

1. Communications concerning violence against women

2. A communication dated 27 January 1994 was received from an individual in the United States of America referring to the situation of women and girls in the territory of a war-torn country and similar situations, expressing concern regarding atrocities against women, such as mass rape and forced pregnancy as part of a campaign of "ethnic cleansing". The author stated that the rights of women needed to be recognized and protected. The support of the United Nations was sought in this connection.

3. A communication dated 28 April 1994 was received from an individual in the United States of America expressing major concern about the issue of female circumcision. While recognizing all the cultural and ethnic differences, the author demanded that people be educated about the pain, infections and humiliation suffered by women in order to make this practice disappear.

4. A communication dated 13 December 1994 was received from an individual in France on behalf of an international solidarity network referring to the practice of female genital mutilation, which is allegedly traditionally practised in different countries around the world. The author alleged that at least 2 million girls every year were at risk of suffering female genital mutilation and called it an extreme form of the many traditional practices used to deny women independence and equality. The support of the United Nations in the fight to eradicate the practice was sought.

5. A communication dated 16 October 1994 was received from a non-governmental group in Bangladesh alleging a climate of terror in some countries and protesting the limitations it allegedly imposes on women. The authors of the communication affirmed their solidarity with all progressive women and requested

the United Nations to take more effective measures to combat attacks against progressive women and to hold all extremists accountable for their actions.

2. Communications concerning women's health

6. A communication dated 5 April 1994 was received from an individual in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of a non-governmental organization and enclosing a resolution adopted by an international conference that had been attended by participants from 26 European countries demanding that reproductive freedom be one of the main concerns at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, as well as at the preparatory meetings. The author stated that although the right to plan one's family had been declared a basic right in 1968, it had not been recognized or guaranteed in most countries. It was further stated that the denial of free access to sex education, contraception or abortion constituted a form of coercion and violence against women. The author called upon the organizers of international conferences in 1994 and 1995 to make reproductive freedom a top priority and, in so doing, to resist any pressure from religious forces tending to restrict that fundamental freedom.

7. A communication dated 8 September 1994 was received from a non-governmental organization emphasizing its preoccupation regarding equality of opportunity for women and men in the European region. The organization expressed its concern about the future of women and children in the world and asked that all necessary measures be taken to guarantee their survival, their health and their human rights. The organization pronounced itself in favour of sensible family planning and took the view that sound economic conditions and a firm political will to educate women were an indispensable basis for family planning. The organization urged Governments to adopt appropriate legislation so that women could make an individual choice.

3. Communications concerning the effects of economic blockades on women

8. A communication dated 1 May 1994 was received from an individual in Iraq on behalf of a non-governmental organization alleging that economic blockades were having serious effects on basic human rights and the rights of women and the family. The author also expressed great concern regarding alleged disinformation from the countries that imposed economic blockades and stated that deterioration of food and health safety, which primarily affected women and children, constituted a serious violation of social, economic and cultural rights and adversely affected civil and political rights, thereby violating international instruments and declarations dealing with human rights. The author called upon the international community to lift economic blockades and upon the United Nations and its specialized agencies to investigate the situation of women and children in countries against which blockades were imposed. The author called upon the international media to report news on the effects of such blockades to enable victims to be heard and called upon

international and national non-governmental organizations to denounce continued blockades by all appropriate means.

4. Communications concerning women's portrayal in the media

9. A communication was received on 24 May 1994 from an individual in France demanding that the issue of increased pornographic portrayal of women be added to the issues to be addressed at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. The author alleged that in Western countries and in Asia more and more demeaning images of women were shown in advertisements, on television, in newspapers and in films. While acknowledging that all the other issues to be addressed at the forthcoming Conference were very important, the author demanded that the portrayal of women in the media also be addressed.

5. Communications concerning the effects of extremism on women

10. A communication dated 23 June 1994 was received from a non-governmental organization alleging extremist trends in some societies and urging Governments to introduce mechanisms, including legal reforms and adequate resources, to ensure accountability for violence against women and to eliminate it. The United Nations and its specialized agencies were urged to promote effective projects on legal rights awareness and to eliminate the gap between the de jure and the de facto situation of women, so that they could achieve full power-sharing, economic independence, education and training.

B. Communications concerning the status of women received by other units of the United Nations Secretariat (including the regional commissions), other United Nations bodies and the specialized agencies

11. The Division for the Advancement of Women, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1983/27, asked other units of the Secretariat (including the regional commissions), other United Nations bodies and the specialized agencies whether they had received any non-confidential communications concerning the status of women, together with information on subsequent action that might have been taken.

12. The following replied that they had received no such communications:

(a) United Nations units and bodies: Division for Palestinian Rights, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Food Programme (WFP);

(b) Specialized agencies: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).